

REMARKS

The Application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office Action dated October 1, 2004 (Paper No. 7). Claims 21 to 48 are in the application, of which Claims 21, 25, 31, 35, 41 and 45 are independent. Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

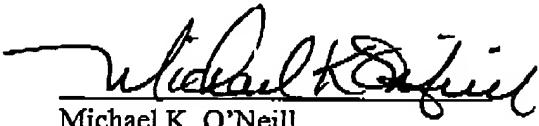
Claims 1 to 48 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) over U.S. Patent 5,617,224 (Ichikawa). Claims 1 to 20 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer of subject, and without conceding the correctness of the rejection. The rejection of the remaining claims is respectfully traversed.

Traversal is based primarily on the observation that Ichikawa is directed to a mask used for thinning or fattening of character images, whereas the mask of the present invention is used at the periphery of a recording sheet that provides a margin (or blank area) in the vicinity of the sheet's edge. The mask of the present invention therefore differs fundamentally from the mask of Ichikawa, and likewise provides advantages (such as prevention of toner stain or contamination of a recording apparatus) not provided by the Ichikawa arrangement.

Amendments to Claims 21 to 48 have been made so as to define the nature of the mask, such as the amendment to Claim 21 which specifies that a masking unit provides a "sheet-edge margin." Other changes have also been made to the claims, primarily to broaden them such as through elimination of means-plus-function language. In view of the fundamental differences between the mask of the present invention and that of Ichikawa, it is respectfully requested to withdraw the §102(b) rejection of the claims and to pass this case to issue.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Costa Mesa, California office by telephone at (714) 540-8700. All correspondence should be directed to our address given below.

Respectfully submitted,


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